

Nursing the Near-Term Baby

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Give the Best

Nat'l Naval Medical Ctr
Lactation Support Team
8901 Wisconsin Ave
Bethesda, MD 20889

Need more help?

If you have additional questions about breastfeeding or the services offered through the Lactation Support Program, Please call our office weekdays between 0800-1400

Call: 301-319-5033 or 301-295-9959

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Adapted from EC Brooks,
JD, IBCLC, April 2003
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Babies who arrive a few weeks before your due date may need extra help and more time to learn how to breastfeed well. Even if your baby **looks** big, he may still need help feeding in the first few weeks.

“Near-term” babies may behave like “Preemies”:

- Can't “tune out” noise and distractions.
- Can be sound asleep one minute and crying the next.
- Have uncoordinated suck-swallow-breathe rhythm.
- Have a weak suck.
- Have low muscle tone. (baby may need extra support with pillows or rolled towels)
- Can't keep their temperatures up. (babies can't shiver to keep warm like adults do)
- Nurse well for a few minutes, then fall asleep before finishing the meal.

Suggestions for successful feedings:

- Keep stimulation LOW. Lights down, TV off, voices quiet.
- Keep baby warm. Leave baby's clothes and hat on.
- You may need to wake your baby for feedings during the first few weeks. Rub baby's back with firm (not tickly) strokes to help wake him up. If baby wakes on his own, feed immediately. You can wait to change the diaper after the feeding.
- Use pillows or rolled towels for extra positioning and support.
- Stroke the baby's lips with your nipple to get his interest. Wait for baby to open his mouth WIDE before offering the breast.
- Massage and gently compress your breast during the feeding to keep baby nursing and increase the creamier milk to the baby.
- Your baby may need extra chin and cheek support while nursing. Please ask your lactation consultant how to use the “dancer hand” hold.

Some final reminders:

Your near-term baby may benefit from big feedings followed by long naps or may prefer smaller more frequent feedings. Some babies will combine both patterns and feed often for part of the day and then have one longer stretch of sleep. As long as the baby is getting enough (8-12) feedings in a 24 hour day, the pattern doesn't matter. You can also watch how much is going out in the diapers to let you know that the baby is getting enough milk.

Near-term babies can be easily overwhelmed, even when your intentions are loving. Gently hold your baby skin-to-skin (whether you are nursing or just snuggling) Cover yourselves together. Be sure to keep him warm after your snuggle session, too. These babies burn calories trying to stay warm and they lose heat through their heads. You can leave the hat on the baby to help hold in the heat.

Give yourself and your new baby a little extra time to learn to breastfeed. You both may need additional support and nurturing. If your baby is unable to breastfeed, please ask for help with pumping your milk.

Promote, Protect, Support Breastfeeding

